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Haunting Histories of Transgenerational Trauma in Lydie Salvayre's *La Compagnie des spectres* (1997): A Taking Stock of 'Madness' and 'Transmission'

Susan Bainbrigge

'Il y a des moments dans la vie où la question de savoir si on peut penser autrement qu'on ne pense et percevoir autrement qu'on ne voit est indispensable pour continuer à regarder ou à réfléchir' (Foucault 1984, 15–16)

Introduction

It is difficult to read Lydie Salvayre's *La Compagnie des spectres*, in which a mother and daughter in crisis feature centre stage, without being reminded of predecessor mother–daughter pairings in women's writing in French.¹ In works by Simone de Beauvoir, Marie Cardinal, Jacqueline Harpman, Marie Darrieussecq and Marguerite Duras, for example, we do not have to look far to find powerful mother figures, often accompanied by rebellious daughters, caught in the fraught dynamics associated with the processes of identification and separation.² Mother Rose Mélie (her name an echo perhaps of Marie Redonnet's *Rose Mélie Rose*³), the 'madwoman' in Salvayre's text, 'avec son visage de folle, son regard de folle et sa voix de folle' (14), is reminiscent

- 1 This article was first presented as a paper at the Motherhood in Post-1968 European Literature conference, 24–6 October 2013, Institute of Modern Language Research, London. I am grateful to Gillian Ni Cheallaigh and the MLO reviewers for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.
- 2 See Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, in which she traces the ways in which stories of motherhood have informed representations of the family and society, in terms of 'unspeakable' plots and controversies around subject formation.
- 3 Redonnet's text, which is part of a trilogy published between 1986 and 1987 (*Splendid Hôtel*, *Forever Valley*, *Rose Mélie Rose*), also features mother and daughter pairings: Mélie is deeply affected by adoptive mother Rose. Although madness is not foregrounded in this text, the questions of identity, legacies and (conscious and unconscious) transmission are at the heart of the narrative. See Fallaize (1992).

of Simone de Beauvoir's Murielle in *La Femme rompue*, with her haphazard, crude, stream-of-consciousness diatribes. She also follows in the footsteps of numerous maternal imagos as portrayed in *Les Mots pour le dire* (1976), *La Fille démantelée* (1990), *Truismes* (1996) and *L'Amant* (1984) by their narrator daughters.⁴ Increasingly, as Suzanne Dow notes in her 2009 study, contemporary authors in French write about madness in ways that use irony, that are self-conscious and that employ self-reflexive narrative strategies (191).⁵ Salvayre's text is linguistically ambitious in its use of diverse registers, and its presentation of narrative voice, or, more accurately, voices, since the perspectives of both the mother and the daughter are presented. The depictions of the two women, the 'mad' mother and her 'disturbed' daughter, pose questions about the positioning, function and reception of the 'madwoman' in the text and, indeed, beyond the text, where such a figure – as noted by Foucault and others – is often destined to function in society as a receptacle for the projected, psychically unbearable 'insanities' of others.

In its treatment of the Holocaust and its traumatic legacies, the text also belongs to a corpus that includes writings by Georges Perec, Sylvie Germain, Nancy Huston and Philippe Grimbert.⁶ In *La Compagnie des spectres*, traumatic events from the Occupation of France are revisited through Rose's memories, and as narrated directly by her, and via her daughter Louisiane.⁷ Rose's brother was tortured and murdered by French Nazi supporters in 1943, and she continues to blame Pétain and Darnand in her sleeping and waking hours. The ghosts who haunt the mother and her family become enmeshed and confused with present-day events which function as parallel processes, and onto which the dramas of Rose's internal world are externalized. One article from 1978 published in *L'Express* is a case in point. This revisits the Paris wartime round-ups and deportation of Jews which were coordinated by the Vichy regime, focusing in particular on those deemed responsible (Darquier de Pellepoix naming Bosquet as orchestrator). The publication of the article is shown to function as a particular trigger in the story for the deterioration in Rose's mental state, in the wake of the unleashing of memories of numerous unresolved experiences in which the grieving process has been arrested (156). Her traumatic experiences are further dramatized through the lens of a later unexpected visitation to the family home by a bailiff, as

4 For studies of motherhood in French women's writing, see, for example, comparative studies by Dow (2009), Fell (2003), Robson (2004) and Rye (2009).

5 For a study of women and the treatment of madness, see Appignanesi (2008) and the recent volume on madness and literature edited by Ni Cheallaigh, Jackson and McIlvanney (2014).

6 See Perec, *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* (1975); Germain, *Magnus* (2005); Huston, *L'Empreinte de l'ange* (1998); and Grimbert, *Un secret* (2004).

7 See Lasserre (2002) for an analysis of the depiction and function of history in the text.

recounted by Louisiane. The story is structured around this bailiff, who has come to make an inventory of their possessions. Onto the bailiff is projected all that Rose remembers and suffers in connection with her family's wartime experiences: she repeatedly asks him whether he has been sent by the Vichy authorities, and condemns him for the fate of her brother, her mother and France generally. Louisiane functions as a go-between in her dealings with him, until the final scene in which mother and daughter join forces violently to evict the bailiff from their property. Crucial to the structure of the book is the presentation of the dynamic relationship between Rose and her daughter.

Mother and daughter are central to the story, and have much to tell us about history, and how it is told, about contemporary society, and about the vicissitudes and complexities of intimate relationships, especially in less than favourable circumstances. This analysis engages with the challenges posed by these two seemingly unreliable, unstable narrators and their stories. What to make of the claustrophobic worlds into which the reader is plunged, in which paranoia, repetition, incoherence, disordered speech, delusion, hallucination, excess and aggression loom large? Such 'symptoms' would not be atypical in a clinical context of a diagnosis of psychotic illness such as schizophrenia.⁸ Salvayre, a practising child psychiatrist, explores traumatic experiences and their effects beyond the confines of diagnostic and psychiatric literature, by means of a darkly humorous and biting depiction of society in which language serves multiple purposes in the text – for example, for humour, elucidation, ingratiation or obfuscation. Words form bland, everyday exchanges alongside excesses of grandiosity via namedropping and performances of erudition. *La Compagnie des spectres* is described by Marie-Pascale Huglo as ostentatiously theatrical and a 'pur récit de paroles' (115). However, the text is not gratuitous in its wordplay: it challenges our understanding of the boundaries between past and present, sanity and madness, and invites further exploration of what we understand by 'transmission' and heritage, especially in relation to mental health or, more specifically, ill health.⁹ What to make of the two characters'

8 Their presentation resembles the typical diagnostic criteria for a psychotic illness. See *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th Edition (2013), published by the American Psychiatric Association, and brief online summary: 'Schizophrenia is characterized by delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech and behaviour, and other symptoms that cause social or occupational dysfunction', available online at <http://www.dsm5.org/Documents/Schizophrenia%20fact%20Sheet.pdf>. Accessed 24 August 2015.

9 A recent study from Mount Sinai hospital, New York, now suggests that transgenerational trauma, identified thus far in psychological terms, may also have an epigenetic component. See Helen Thomas, 'Study of Holocaust Survivors Finds Trauma Passed on to Children's Genes', *The Guardian*, 21 August 2015, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/aug/21/study-of-holocaust-survivors-finds-trauma-passed-on-to-childrens-genes>. Accessed 24 August 2015.

apparent loss of contact with reality, presented within the confines of their apartment? This self-imposed asylum appears to both protect and confine them, and it is unclear whether their madness is exacerbated by their isolation, or whether this relatively safe space, now threatened by the bailiff, has enabled them to continue to exist by its containment. Louisiane presents her mother to the bailiff in characteristically sardonic terms, as a woman unable to distinguish between past and present, day and night, and whose illness has defied treatment. The mother's resistance to any temporal logic is presented alongside her failure to derive any benefit from various treatments, including healing via medicine or religious faith. Both are deemed to be useless in the face of her particular 'atypical' difficulties:

Ma mère, monsieur l'huissier, ne distingue pas le passé du présent, le jour de la nuit, ni les vivants des morts. C'est un cas d'aliénation mentale très atypique et qui résiste aux traitements psychiatriques les plus carabinés ainsi qu'à l'eau de Lourdes, nous avons tout essayé (80).¹⁰

In an interview published in 1998, Lydie Salvayre commented that *La Compagnie des spectres* had frequently been summarized primarily as 'a book about Vichy'. While the story undoubtedly engages with this period of French history, Salvayre stressed the importance of the mother-daughter relationship in the text, and, in particular, the impact of the *transmission* of trauma from one generation to the next: 'Oui, et là on passe à la trappe la moitié du livre, et même, si l'on veut, le livre entier! Il s'agit d'un discours à deux, d'une *transmission*, de mère à fille, de la révolte et de la folie' [my emphasis].¹¹ These processes of transgenerational transmission remain a recurring interest in Salvayre's writings, as demonstrated more recently by her 2014 Goncourt prize-winning novel *Pas Pleurer* (this time concerning the Spanish Civil War (1936–9), and the mother-daughter relationship).¹²

The dynamics between mother and daughter have attracted interest from critics who have focused on the blurring of identities between the two women and on the impact of the way in which the narrative is focalized. Huglo, for example, describes the daughter's voice in terms of 'une voix ventriloque qui porte la sienne (en tant que personnage) et celle de sa propre mère' (115), and Warren Motte identifies the daughter's echoing of her mother's words – and those of the bailiff – in terms of both Rose and Louisiane's functions

10 All references in the text are to the 1997 Seuil edition.

11 See Interview with Alain Nicolas in *L'Humanité* online (1998).

12 Note the central role of the mother in this autobiographically inspired account, in which the theme of transmission remains present. See the review by Lançon (2014), in which he writes of the mother that 'La transmission, lorsqu'elle passe d'une langue et d'un pays perdu à l'autre, se fait par les hybridations et les déformations du langage: elle porte les blessures du passé, le bricolage du présent et l'inventivité propre à la survie.'

as 'linguistic chameleons' (1014). Salvayre was keen in the aforementioned interview to stress nonetheless their distinct identities, whose particularities (and enmeshments) will be analysed further in due course. She noted, 'Il y a deux voix. Deux voix qu'on ne saurait réduire à une seule [...]. La question est: que transmet-on de notre fardeau?' (Nicolas 1998). This question will be examined in more detail below, with a particular focus on the question of 'heritage' and its relationship to transmission of trauma within this text. In the following analysis of the transmission of trauma and its implications for legacies, I will explore the ways in which theories of transgenerational transmission inform Salvayre's text, through readings which attend both to form and content. The relational struggles and dynamics between mother and daughter will be identified and considered in the light of psychoanalytic theories on attachment and loss in order to broaden understanding of both mother and daughter's disturbance. Salvayre's challenging of the madness–sanity binary in the text will then be explored via an analysis of the mother's transmission of knowledge (of various kinds), and of how this 'legacy' affects the relationship between Rose and Louisiane. Rose's commentaries and critiques on contemporary society offer a further lens through which to assess her positioning as 'madwoman'. With reference to Foucauldian frameworks on projections of madness, and potential Kristevan readings of transgressive madness, I will re-evaluate the complexities of transmission for mother and daughter, in diverse contexts. Finally, the extent to which daughter Louisiane processes and articulates these multiple transmissions will then be explored via the motif of the inventory itself. At the heart of the story, in Rose and Louisiane's encounter with the bailiff, the inventory also functions in other symbolic ways, not least by virtue of the epigraph to the book in which it is foregrounded. The significance of the inventory will be considered alongside theories on narration (by the likes of Dori Laub), and I will question to what extent Louisiane manages transmissions of trauma by her own 'taking stock'.

Transmission of Trauma and Parallel Processes

Numerous writers (e.g. Primo Levi, Theodor Adorno, Tzvetan Todorov) have asked whether it is possible to write about events of unspeakable horror. Others question whether a language exists to speak of trauma, or to evoke the trauma of loss, the 'unsayables' or 'unspeakables'.¹³ The term 'transgenera-

13 There is an extensive bibliography on this subject, which includes, for example, Adorno (2003), Augé (1998), Ferenczi and Boltanski (2002), Hoffman (2004), Laub and Felman (1992), Caruth (1996), LaCapra (2001), Leys (2000), Rothberg (2009), Suleiman (2006), Todorov (2004) and Young (1988).

tional trauma' is understood to be a trauma that passes down the generations, often used in the context of Holocaust survivors (see Hirsch 2008; Schwab 2010). Schwab summarizes that '[i]t is through the unconscious transmission of disavowed familial dynamics that one generation affects another generation's unconscious' (4). Other events, such as crimes in Algeria, Rwandan genocide, the Chernobyl crisis, also feature in Salvayre's text as anchoring points which precisely ground the story in a particular social and historical reality (81, 150). These are linked by the mother to earlier tragedies, with the implicit critique that history repeats itself as a result of human ignorance and prejudice. Grandmother, mother and daughter are implicated in a transgenerational narrative which weaves their various stories together.¹⁴ Indeed, in a study which brings together Holocaust studies and post-colonial theory, Rothberg's emphasis on what he terms 'multidirectional memory' highlights the 'multidirectional confluence of disparate historical imaginaries', reminding us that memory is a porous, labile and unstable capacity by which the mind stores and remembers information, always being shaped by comparative contexts (171).

Through the written word and the literary form, Salvayre opens up for scrutiny what we understand by experiences of '*aliénation mentale*'; what this heritage and transmission mean for one family, of many, and in which one '*enfance de désastre*' (21) is followed by another. Rose is stuck in a never-ending revisiting (in daytime hallucinations and night terrors) of the events of her brother's torture and murder in 1943 at the hands of French supporters of Nazis. These memories are repeated in a manner reminiscent of Freud's theories on repressed trauma and grief, as presented in '*Remembering, Repeating, Working Through*' (1914), and subsequent essays such as '*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*' (1920). The trauma has become psychically stuck, and is endlessly repeated and revisited. The grief process has been arrested. What Freud calls the process of '*working through*' is stalled, with the result that the mother lives as if she were still in 1943: '*C'était le 13 mars 1943. C'était hier*' (22). For the daughter, listening to her mother is like listening to a broken record. She says repeatedly that her mother is out of synch, '*déphasée*, '*décentrée*' and '*anachronique*' (30). The dramatic confusion of past and present realities points to a woman who is psychotic, unable or unwilling (whether on a conscious or unconscious level) to differentiate between past and present, reality and fantasy, and caught in a spiral of conflated memories and fantasies. Transmissions of trauma in fact affect the mother-daughter relationship across three generations of women (the grandmother, who is also mentioned in the story, also suffers during the Second World War¹⁵). The

14 On the grandmother's resistance to Pétain and Vichy policies, see chapter 13, for example.

15 See, for example, her mother's arrest and imprisonment during the Occupation, described in chapter 12.

recurring question asked by the daughter is whether misfortune can indeed be inherited (59).

A well-known clinical study by Fraiberg and colleagues, entitled 'Ghosts in the Nursery' (1975), analyses impaired infant-mother relationships in the light of transgenerational trauma. Since its publication, this work has had a significant impact beyond the clinical realm. For example, trauma, as viewed more recently by the likes of Hirsch and Schwab, is examined precisely in terms of the passing down of traumatic experiences to subsequent generations. Hirsch's use of the term 'postmemory' highlights the unconscious and projective aspects of this transmission, which are particularly salient features for the purposes of this analysis:

Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. [...]. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present (106-7).

Hirsch's definition of 'postmemories' includes all kinds of experiences and relationships, such as objects, images and stories, as well as behaviours and affects passed on within a family and more broadly within the culture.¹⁶ In *La Compagnie des spectres* the inherited transmissions largely concern the latter. These affects and behaviours can be readily traced in the text, and also via the form itself, through disjuncture, resistance, reversal and repetition. The transgenerational traumas haunt and intertwine with the relational struggles and enactments of mother and daughter. Salvayre writes that '[l]e discours de la mère, auquel résiste la fille, c'est l'éternel présent du malheur' (Nicolas 1998). Mother and daughter rail against the circumstances in which they find themselves. Both are desperate to be heard: by each other, by the bailiff, by a society apparently indifferent to their situation (173). The bailiff's unwelcome intrusion threatens their precarious existence, triggering nightmares for Rose, in which past histories and ghosts have not been laid to rest: 'Ces images vont me tuer' (21). Her trauma is described as one that endures and is endlessly repeated, and indeed transmitted, to the next generation, via daughter Louisiane, who fears its contagion and complains, 'J'étais malade

16 Hirsch states that 'Postmemory is not identical to memory: it is "post," but at the same time, it approximates memory in its affective force' (109); 'These "not memories" communicated in "flashes of imagery" and "broken refrains," transmitted through "the language of the body," are precisely the stuff of postmemory' (109).

de l'entendre hurler' (23); 'Ça me rend dingue' (26); 'Elle me gâche la vie, elle m'empoisonne' (26); 'j'ai le sentiment que sa folie insidieusement me gagne' (82). The return of the repressed is described as engendering fear, rebellion and madness in both mother and daughter:

La peur chez elle est faite de tout ce qu'elle imagine et elle imagine sans cesse que le pire s'accomplit. En sorte que ma mère a peur de tout, monsieur, ma mère a peur de tout, même de Dieu que quelquefois dans son délire elle appelle Putain, peur de moi sa fille, peur d'elle-même, peur de tout, comme si toutes les peurs du monde s'étaient ramassées en elle et développées dans des proportions inouïes. Et ma mère, pensai-je, m'a infusé cette peur (41-2).

Louisiane thus absorbs this contaminating fear, transmitted by her mother, and amplified to catastrophic proportions in this quotation by force of repetition. We might wonder whether the mother's fear has its origins in the traumatic events of the Occupation, or, if we consider Freud's position, possibly much earlier.¹⁷ Louisiane's name is infused with a memory of death and unmet promise, since she is named after Rose's dead brother, Jean, who had dreamed of exploring the United States, in particular the Mississippi River in Louisiana (136-7). The repetitive force of such descriptions of persecuting fear conveys the overwhelming power of Rose's compulsive utterings. The daughter articulates her desire to silence her mother in the face of her impossible logorrhoea. She is in her own nightmare, unable to separate, afraid of her mother and her 'yeux de folle' (43), unable to leave the flat, and yet she dreams of running away. She depicts herself as the caregiver caught in a relationship in which the levels of unprocessed, unconscious ambivalence veer into outright, explicit hostility. Louisiane explicitly acknowledges the punishing quality of her 'caring' role, a response which speaks to the frustration which the role reversal of mother and daughter has engendered:

une mère que je nourris, que je punis, [...], que je protège contre les miliciens qui la harcèlent la nuit et la réveillent à coups de bottes dans le ventre, car ma mère est ma fille, monsieur, ma mère est ma fille plus vieille que moi de quarante ans, et je dois l'élever. (42-3)¹⁸

It is a far from ideal situation, in which she describes keeping her mother incarcerated and heavily sedated.¹⁹ Given the clear impact on Louisiane of her

17 The story indicates that Rose's early years were also traumatic. See, for example, 'Car rien ne pouvait arrêter ma mère lorsqu'elle effectuait sa marche arrière qui la catapultait dans son enfance de désastre' (21).

18 See also the reference to Louisiane's financial control: 'Je gère. J'administre. Je supervise. Je calcule les additions' (45).

19 See the description of the medication which the daughter administers to her mother: 'Je prépare ses remèdes du soir: un comprimé d'Artane, un autre de Tranxène, un autre de Largactil et cinquante gouttes de Haldol. Un traitement carabiné' (149).

mother's fragile state of mind, dissociation and confusion, we cannot ignore the very real, traumatic impact of the mother's ill health. Rose's capacity to mother is severely undermined and actively challenged, as had been the case for her own mother. According to the doctors, Louisiane reports, her mother is 'un cas pour la science' (36), a mother who recounts that she had her first sexual experience aged six (66). We learn that she met Louisiane's father in the Sainte-Anne asylum, where they had a brief affair (70). If Louisiane is indeed the fruit of this encounter (the fact is not explicitly stated within the story), then her identity and origins, as conceived from within the asylum, would lend further metaphorical significance to the story of transmission and the question of legacy.

From psychoanalytic readings on mothering and attachment, Donald Winnicott's theories on 'good enough' mothering (1971) and John Bowlby's work on the importance of the secure base for infant development (1988) offer frameworks in which to situate their enmeshed relationship. From the many descriptions of Rose and Louisiane, we can surmise that the mother's childcare was deficient, and that the relationship between mother and child is largely an insecure and ambivalent one. There were numerous separations between mother and child (e.g. during the mother's period of hospitalization; the placing of her child with foster carers; and at other times when she was unable to attend to her daughter's needs). There is a striking absence of any sense of a 'secure base' in the way that Bowlby describes both mother or attachment figure, and the environment. The mother's own traumatic history, with the legacy of her mother's experiences, impinges on her ability to be able to attend to, or even be aware of, her daughter's needs. In turn, it becomes clear that the daughter manages this trauma – of an absent mother in childhood, and the presence of a traumatized mother in later years – by enacting role reversals, in which she, Louisiane, assumes the maternal role (173). She also creates what Winnicott calls a compliant 'false self', a protective means to safeguard the self against perceived threats.²⁰ This false 'good girl' façade is referred to explicitly by the daughter as follows: 'Afin de paraître bonne fille, je m'efforçai de sourire, tandis qu'en mon for intérieur je rageais' (27). The narrative reveals the points at which such a coping mechanism breaks down. Legacies of shame, blame and rage are then passed down the generations, in vicious cycles, and where the cost of the burden of being 'en pourparlers avec les spectres' (173), as Louisiane puts it, is loss of contact with the living.²¹

20 See Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (10) and 'Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self' (140–52).

21 See Ledoux-Beaugrand's emphasis in her analysis of the text on the impact of the spectral voices on Louisiane's sense of self. She argues that 'les voix spectrales prennent corps, s'incarnent en faisant du corps de Louisiane leur nouvelle demeure' (149).

So preoccupied is Rose by ghosts from the past that there is little space to extricate herself from their powerful hold on the present. This is seen as being detrimental to her relationship with her daughter. The stranglehold of the past lends weight to the well-known Faulkner quotation that 'The past is never dead. It's not even past' (*Requiem for a Nun*, 1951).²² Such consideration of attachment patterns, reactions and repeated (traumatic) enactments brings the mother-daughter relationship to the fore as part of a broader presentation of the nature and impact of the transgenerational transmission of trauma.

Heritage and Legacies

Analysing the text via processes of 'transmission' offers various possible routes for interpretation. With madness can come insight and wisdom, and the two are often intertwined in the text in a way that challenges binary oppositions of the madness-sanity type. The mother's madness is experienced by the daughter as a burden, a curse, but also the route to potential enlightenment, with the passing on of important family stories and legacies, and more generally via the sharing of knowledge. The 'mad' mother in the text reads voraciously.²³ In her rants, she cites ancient philosophers: Seneca (28, 152, 174), Epicurus (40), Plutarch (136), and Epictetus (174). She is a compulsive researcher on traumatic events from the past and on those she holds responsible for them. Her research is conducted with a missionary-like zeal which results at one point in a psychotic episode followed by hospitalization. What of the knowledge that the mother insistently emphasizes needs to be passed on? She is extremely well read, but only concerning works published before 1940. Her views on the study of canonical works of literature and philosophy sound relatively uncontroversial: encouraging everyone to read the classics would be for the greater good and would make for a more humane world, she argues.²⁴ She emphasizes the dynamic relationship of past to present and future: 'Elle dit encore que le jour où tout le monde lira de grands livres, l'humanité sera réconciliée' (177). And yet we have seen that Rose's educational pursuits take her to the edge of reason, and sometimes beyond. She clings to the certainty of the past, even if abhorrent, to safeguard against an even more frightening unknown present or future, frequently imagined and projected as malign diabolical forces:

22 In terms of clinical examination of such phenomena, see Fraiberg et al. (1975).

23 See the references to her numerous books and files (177), and her compulsive research on Darnand (chapter 5).

24 See Motte on Salvayre's complex relationship to, and depiction of, literature in her writings.

ma mère s'enlisa dans un passé dont l'horreur qu'il lui inspirait avait au moins cet avantage de lui être familière. Elle s'y agrippa comme au seul sol solide. Elle y trouva un refuge constant contre les aléas du présent et les menaces effroyables de l'avenir' (183).

Is her compulsive research a defence against the pain of loss? It seems to offer a safe internal 'space' to which to cling, understood as a refuge and symbolized by the concrete solidity suggested by the alliterative ternary form of 'seul sol solide'. The historical project gives her a reason to live, but at the expense of her familial ties. Unsurprisingly, her daughter is ambivalent about her obsessive pursuits (165; 173), and, by extension, the status of 'knowledge' more generally, claiming that it results in her mother's neglect of the living in favour of negotiating with ghosts. Psychoanalyst Melanie Klein's ground-breaking concept of position ('paranoid-schizoid' and 'depressive') to describe states of mind and patterns of relating (1964) offers a further means to reflect on Rose's understanding of herself and others: her internal world is presented as one predominantly associated with the paranoid-schizoid position; she is unable to mourn her loss, caught in repetitive practices, prone to projection, splitting, hostile, fearful and persecuting fantasies, and using the pursuit of knowledge, in an extreme, excessive and compulsive way, as a defence against mourning.²⁵ This Kleinian perspective accounts for the powerful impact of unmourned losses, and highlights the extent to which Rose is overwhelmed by unconscious dynamics in which the repetition of trauma persists.

However, Rose makes apposite points about the state of France, and the world more generally. She presents knowledge as crucial for the survival of a questioning, ultimately 'healthy' future. She stresses the importance of understanding what makes individuals the way they are, namely the impact of their early life and upbringing (for Darnand, for the Jadre twins, as evidenced by the biographies she presents of them in which their fateful histories unravel), particularly with respect to the powerful effect of experiences of shame and humiliation. Rose justifies her self-appointed educational role by stressing to Louisiane that one day, inevitably, she will no longer be there to pass the knowledge on: 'Je t'enseigne l'Histoire car bientôt je mourrai, les bouches des derniers survivants se rempliront de terre, et qui sera là pour te dire les paralipomènes du siècle qui s'achève?' (44).²⁶ In the same way, Rose – the adoptive mother in Redonnet's *Rose Mèlie Rose* – passes

25 For further elaboration of these theories, see Mitchell's edited volume, *The Selected Melanie Klein* (1986), and Likierman's chapter, 'The Paranoid-Schizoid Position', in her study of Melanie Klein's work in context (2001).

26 'Paralipomena' is the Greek neuter past participle plural for 'things omitted'. It may also refer to 'Paralipomenon', a Greek name for the Old Testament Books of Chronicles.

on her 'livre de légendes' to daughter figure Mélie (1987).²⁷

Thus there can be lucidity in Rose's madness, albeit shrouded by paranoid fantasies – she believes herself to be 'investie d'une mission sacrée, celle de révéler au grand jour les paralipomènes de l'Histoire' (156) – and somewhat dissociated quasispectral states. One might argue that at times she seems to occupy a space of the 'living dead'. Yet in Foucault's *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* he argues that the so-called 'mad' in society are elected to carry madness on behalf of everyone. They then express a more general 'alienated experience' via these voices of unreason. Ursula Tidd, in her analysis of Murielle, Beauvoir's madwoman from the collection *La Femme rompue*, writes that 'others are elected to live out the chaos that we refuse to confront in ourselves. By this means, we escape a certain anxiety, but only at a price that is as immense as it is unrecognised' (369).²⁸ So if there is a madwoman in the text, indeed two madwomen, given Louisiane's own struggles, there may also be insight. As Tidd asks, are they both, like Murielle, expressing a more general 'alienated experience' via their voices of 'unreason' (369)? It is not straightforward to draw any firm conclusions about the gesture of (deranged) solidarity that unites mother and daughter at the end, when they join forces to evict the man who has come presumably to evict them. They push him out in a wild frenzy, while hurling at him the words of Marcus Cato from Plutarch. Salvayre had specified, as noted earlier, a process of transmission of 'révolte' and 'folie' from mother to daughter in the work. Here, mother and daughter's revolt and madness come together to characterize a moment of what appears to be justified solidarity in evicting the intruder. We find out in the companion text, *Quelques conseils utiles aux élèves huissiers*, that the process server is in fact a supporter of Pétain, and is intolerant of any kind of difference.²⁹ Rose's suspicions are not wholly delusional, it seems, disturbed as she is. The process server is revealed in the companion text to be a less than admirable character, and the apparently arbitrary conflation of him by Rose with supporters of Nazi ideology becomes less far-fetched. The extent of her evident 'madness' is open to question.

The madwoman's voice in the text could thus be understood as a poten-

27 The transmission of knowledge and the name Rose Mélie could be viewed intertextually in conjunction with *Rose Mélie Rose*. In this latter work the passing on of an important book plays a symbolic role, although, as mentioned earlier, transmission of madness is not a particular feature of Redonnet's text.

28 Tidd's 2002 reading of the madwoman in Simone de Beauvoir's 'Monologue' offers a more sympathetic reading of the frequently condemned Murielle, in the light of the theories of R. D. Laing and Julia Kristeva.

29 He speaks with pomposity and some of his pronouncements about public order carry sinister connotations. The English translation, *The Company of Ghosts*, includes this work at the end of the volume.

tially subversive one. As we have seen, Rose protests against forgotten traumatic events of the past. The disruptive, eclectic and often violent way in which she speaks is suggestive of Julia Kristeva's analysis (1980) of a language which breaks free from the symbolic order, and which rejects or subverts norms regarding language and syntax. Viewed as a transgressive matrilinear language (labelled the 'semiotic' function), based on instinctual drives which articulate contradictory, transgressive and sometimes abject points of view, this would place the text in a recognizably French lineage alongside the likes of Chantal Chawaf, Hélène Cixous, Marguerite Duras and Emma Santos.³⁰ The mother willingly claims for herself the status of 'madwoman', using this appellation in preference to that of 'Madame'. The text presents a raw exploration of an enmeshed relationship between mother and daughter, as depicted via themes of transmission and loss, via subversion of social codes, and through the disrupted and competing narrative structures and language of the text itself.³¹ The mother's intended transmission of knowledge is not a straightforward one; it is excessive and overwhelming (and also arrested in the sense that she refuses to read any works published after 1940). The daughter's experience conveys the disturbing, abject aspects of *both* absence and presence, void and excess, self and other.

Any analysis of both form and content faces the task of problematizing the narrated experiences of the two women, and their contextualization within a concrete sociopolitical framework and critique, alongside more textually oriented linguistic considerations. Focus on the latter need not lose sight of the historical and psychological concerns at the heart of the story, in which explorations of supposed madness, if reduced to transgressive linguistic textual play, would betray both the social critique and the engagement with the legacies and weight of transgenerational trauma which the author describes, and to which she returns in subsequent works. A Kristevan reading of the semiotic thus requires a holding in mind of a transgressive violence within the form and linguistic dynamics of the text, alongside the particular grounded historical events and social norms which are decried. The depiction of Rose's unrelenting outrage in the face of the activities of the Milice (Vichy's repressive 'police force') contrasts with the description of capitulation and habituation by others: 'Mais, avec le temps, les gens du village s'habituent à

30 See Ni Cheallaigh's 2015 unpublished PhD thesis on the figure of the madwoman in novels by Beauvoir, Santos and Lê, with Kristevan frameworks in mind.

31 As seen, for example, in the repeated use of unfinished sentences at the end of chapters. These are sometimes resumed in the subsequent chapter (chapters 2–3; 3–4), but not always (chapter 16). Repetition of phrases is common, and reinforces a thematics of repetition more generally (see e.g. the repeated expression 'je revois' (126), with its suggestion of never-ending return to traumatic early memories).

cette peur. Comme ils s'habituent au malheur. Comme ils s'habituent à l'horreur. Et comme ils s'habituent à tout. Ils, mais pas moi. Pas moi, cria maman [...] (70). Thus the power of the transgressive cry, coming from the voice of mad alterity, amid the repetitive refrain, can be considered within the dynamics of the text, and also beyond it, as part of a critique of a particular society. It is also significant that the daughter's reiterating of her mother's defiant discourse suggests an identification with her here that is experienced in less persecuted, and persecuting, terms.

Indeed, from their experiences, a critique of the society in which they live emerges.³² In the text, the asylum where the mother is committed (for having burst into a television studio uninvited in 1979 to decry Pétain) is called a concentration camp, with references to inmates and harmful 'treatments' (169). There are descriptions of violent and coercive methods of managing ill health. Rose herself is mocking of her treatment therapy (173) and her psychiatrist, calling him Dr Donque (an allusion, perhaps, to Don Quixote and the idealistic, impractical project).³³ Being sent to the asylum is also used as a threat by the daughter to silence her mother, thus reinforcing its disciplinary, potentially punitive power. These strands of the narrative are again evocative of Foucault's analysis of the treatment of madness by punishment and control. There is also a critique of exclusion and of intolerance of difference: this critique encompasses the individual case of the mother Rose Mélie's treatment by the medical establishment, as well as other, broader critiques of abuses of power on the microcosmic and macrocosmic scale, relating, for example, to crimes of genocide. Most clearly, the condemnation of the crimes committed during the Second World War remains in the foreground of the family's experiences. In the analysis which follows, further perspectives on traumatic legacies and the inventory will be considered.

Archives and Inventories

Ledoux-Beaugrand suggests that the daughter's capacity to express herself is severely limited by the various spectral voices which haunt her. She argues that the narrative is doomed to failure: 'De fait, toute tentative de sa part pour énoncer un discours qui lui soit propre et remettre en question le sempiternel récit de sa mère est vouée à l'échec' (149).³⁴ I would suggest that the motif

32 See Salvayre on the daughter, in the interview with Nicolas: 'La société, qui devrait l'aider à s'étayer, la rejette, la renvoie vers sa mère, dont elle reçoit cette révolte.'

33 I am grateful to Gillian Ni Cheallaigh for her suggestion of this potential play on words.

34 See also her concluding comments on the problematics of the mother-daughter relationship within a broader frame of incestuous 'filiation', in which the daughter's individuation is severely compromised (156).

of the inventory in *La Compagnie des spectres* offers another means to view the daughter's positioning. Her narrative, which struggles to 'contain' the mother's, could be viewed as a means to make sense of the process of her and her mother's 'unreason', since it functions potentially as a further inventory. This inventory is juxtaposed with the bailiff's lists, and perhaps also implicitly the notion of inventory attached to psychiatric diagnoses, both of which are representative of a controlled and prescriptive type of documentation.³⁵ The shifts and breaks in the narrative also testify to the struggle to archive their experiences and reality. As Derrida argues in *Mal d'Archive* (1995), the archive could be understood as a compulsive, repetitive and nostalgic enterprise which also contains contradictory aggressive and destructive impulses against itself.³⁶

In *La Compagnie des spectres*, a quotation from Carlo Emilio Gadda's *Eros and Priapus* on the nature of inventories, presented as the epigraph, foregrounds the idea of taking stock in order to purge for cathartic relief: 'Bon, te dis-je, sois sage, calme-toi, car le passage de la folie à la vie raisonnable ne pourra se faire qu'en dressant l'inventaire des arrêts obscurs qui ont déchaîné les pulsions obscures'.³⁷ The quotation presents a further link to thematic preoccupations associated with articulation and repetition of unresolved traumatic experiences. Here, reference is made to the process of coming to identify unknown drives that have been unleashed in certain circumstances, via the 'inventory'. The latter is seen as a means to work through the madness to reach a more stable or measured mode of functioning. The narrative as inventory in *La Compagnie des spectres* fulfils a further containing function in its capacity to gather together the disparate and frequently disrupted strands of both mother and daughter's discourse. Dori Laub, among others, has written about the important therapeutic function of narration for the survivor, with the associated expectations that telling and knowing will liberate the individual to lead a more fulfilling life:

The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive. There is [...] an imperative need to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one's story, unimpeded by the ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life (1995, 63).

35 Note frequent use of the term 'inventory' in the psychiatric literature, to include, for example, the 'personality inventory', and the 'neuropsychiatric inventory for assessment of psychopathology in patients with dementia'.

36 Cited in Sheringham (47, 49).

37 The text was a satirical essay pamphlet; its author was known for his search for unconventional forms of expression, disruptions of narrative and syntax, and his political indictment of Italian fascism.

Rose's limited ability to let go of her ghosts, and the complexity of her re-enactments of earlier trauma, serve as reminders that there are no magic formulae, whether medically or psychologically inspired (or prescribed). Nonetheless, the imperative to narrate has an important function – to make sense of experience, by externalizing it and putting it into words – thus facilitating processes of assimilation (a 'taking stock') in *La Compagnie des spectres*.³⁸ This notion of taking stock also highlights the diverse sources and processes informing selection, or forgetting, contained within its dynamic frame.³⁹ Furthermore, the inventory also carries a potentially reparative function, and, in this regard, Louisiane's testimonial relationship to her mother, in parallel to her mother's perceived educational role for her daughter, could be seen to mitigate the more fraught aspects of their relationship.

Conclusion

These transgenerational hauntings have repercussions for debates about the presentation of gendered madness more generally. The terms 'transmission' and 'legacy' can be read in various ways in the text, and these open up possible readings not only of haunting transmissions of trauma but also of the passing on and integration of knowledge, including the articulation of a type of heritage that is framed in more positive terms, and where apparent insanity could be understood as a legitimate response to an apparently 'insane' world.

If *La Compagnie des spectres* is, as Salvayre suggests, a book about the transmission of trauma and madness from mother to daughter (Fraiberg's 'ghosts in the nursery', who disrupt the relationships for subsequent generations), it is also the telling of the story from the daughter's perspective. This is supported by the fact that the story is the daughter's putting into words of an experience that is very difficult to grasp or, indeed, narrate. The challenge is to reflect on this transmission of 'madness'; how to put a seemingly unrepresentable confusion into words. There are too many words, there is too much, but there is also not enough, it seems. A description of each of them sitting in front of their own television set conveys this paradoxically excessive and impoverished dynamic, which features depictions of both projection and absorption, saturation and emptiness:

38 See Robson's extensive study of trauma and its relationship to memory and narrative in *Writing Wounds: The Inscription of Trauma in Post-1968 French Women's Life-Writing* (2004).

39 See Foucault's *Archéologie du savoir* (1969) on the unconscious dynamics affecting the constructions of histories of ideas.

Dans la journée, maman et moi nous déplaçons l'une et l'autre selon les lignes tangentielles, [...] maman la tête saturée de visions fantastiques qu'elle projette sur l'écran, moi vide à m'emplir d'images vides, maman enthousiasmée et véhémence, ses yeux tournés vers le dedans, moi ennuyée, morose et l'âme avachie (149).⁴⁰

Transgenerational trauma, as numerous clinical case studies from Freud onwards have shown, can have a devastating impact on families. Fictionalized narratives of trauma, as depicted in *La Compagnie des spectres*, offer a creative space in which to explore, via diverse means, the nature of such experiences and their impact on us. There is then scope to account for historical, clinical, linguistic and aesthetic perspectives (thus holding in something of a tension the remit of the clinical study, the context of the historical investigation or the focus on language and form of the textual analysis). Analysis of the transmission of trauma, with the backdrop of the period of the Occupation, in a linguistically experimental fictional work, is something of an ethical minefield. Overly close analysis of the text independently of the context risks losing sight of the very real experiences of the Holocaust, and the charge that the enterprise of writing about such a traumatic event in fiction is an impossible or, indeed, abhorrent one. Ignoring the text's particular dynamics risks simplifying or collapsing the world of the text and the historical and social realities represented in it. By grappling with history and trauma in fiction, via the mother-daughter relationship, and alongside the key motif of inventory, I would argue that Salvayre highlights the possibilities for an engaged and creative enterprise in which the legacies of heritage and loss can be considered in their various manifestations in ways which challenge how we understand relationships, and how we ascribe and locate madness (and sanity) in ourselves and others.

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40 This description, given its emphasis on powerful projections and their effects, could also be analysed in terms of psychoanalytic object relations theory.

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